



*Native Nutrition  
Circles*




## Native Nutrition Circles Video

This video was produced by the Center for American Indian Research & Education (CAIRE). CAIRE's mission is to conduct research within the American Indian and Alaska Native community in order to develop culturally appropriate education and outreach programs.

This video focuses on three important areas:

- ◆ The connection between diet and health.
- ◆ The importance of nutrition among American Indians & Alaska Natives.
- ◆ How to coordinate and conduct a Talking Circle.

This accompanying booklet provides background information on nutrition and the Talking Circle. It highlights important aspects on how to coordinate and conduct a successful Talking Circle.



## Connection Between Diet and Health


Today, diet is an important contributing factor in many of the chronic diseases that afflict American Indians and Alaska Natives. Several of the biggest killers (such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes) are largely or in part affected by the kind of diets followed.

In fact, nutritional factors contribute to at least 4 of the 10 leading causes of death in American Indians. These are:

- heart disease
- cancer
- cirrhosis
- diabetes

Although heredity plays a major role in determining what kinds of diseases people develop, lifestyle habits such as good nutrition can often modify the type or severity of the condition. A healthy diet can also be instrumental in keeping one healthy and disease free. The following are guidelines for a healthy diet.





## **Dietary Guidelines for a Healthy, Balanced Diet:**

1. Eat a variety of foods from all groups including grains, fruits, vegetables, dairy, meat, poultry, fish, dried beans and peas.
2. Balance the food you eat with physical activity; maintain or improve your weight.
3. Choose a diet with plenty of grain products, vegetables, and fruits.
4. Choose a diet low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol.
5. Choose a diet moderate in sugars.
6. Choose a diet moderate in salt and sodium.
7. If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so only in moderation.

### **The Goal of the Native Nutrition Circles**

This project reinforces positive food habits and modifies detrimental ones, thus reducing the risk of cancer and other chronic diseases among Indian families. The Native Nutrition Circles program consists of "Talking Circle" sessions organized to bring women together to talk about the family diet and the importance of nutrition to health.




## **What is a Talking Circle?**

A Talking Circle is an informal gathering where people share information, thoughts, ideas and experiences. It is a place to socialize and give and receive support from one's peers. The Circle provides a caring and supportive environment where Indian women can talk openly about concerns and issues related to their health and family diet.

## **What Takes Place During a Talking Circle?**

The Talking Circles begin with storytelling because the American Indian culture is based on an oral tradition. The spoken word gives life and meaning to Indian history and customs. Songs, chants, curing rites, prayers, lullabies, jokes, personal narratives, and most importantly, stories are the means by which we pass our heritage from one generation to the next.



## What is the Purpose of Telling Stories?

Although Indian stories are meant to entertain, their primary purpose is to educate. Storytellers are generally the most respected and knowledgeable members of the tribe – elders, chiefs, medicine men – who carry with them the legends and myths that contain the tribe's collective wisdom. They are teachers and their students are expected to listen from beginning to end. In our Talking Circles, we relate the stories to a health message. We use the tradition of storytelling to promote health and good living practices.

The American Indian stories selected for this program are meant to bring us together, to teach and reaffirm our traditions and values, and to remind us that we, ourselves, are valuable as Indian women. When we protect our own health, we protect the health of our families and the communities that depend on us.







## **How is the Information Presented?**

The health information is presented by a facilitator. Each of the sessions of the Circle focuses on a specific aspect of diet and health from the Native Nutrition Circles curriculum. These sessions contain valuable health information for Indian women and household members. The facilitator encourages the Circle participants to ask questions and to talk about their experiences related to the topic being discussed. A feather or other talisman is passed around the Circle. The person holding the talisman talks freely until it is passed to the next person. Everyone is given a chance to speak.

## **How Often Does the Circle Meet?**

The group meets once a week for 12 weeks. The first and last sessions involve information gathering. Participants fill out a survey instrument and are administered a 24-hour diet recall. This information will be used to understand the needs and barriers related to nutrition and to assess the effectiveness of the Talking Circle.





## How to Coordinate Talking Circles

*To get the word out, the facilitator should:*

- Contact women by phone and by advertising at the local Indian clinic and at other facilities.
- Contact the clinic and ask to use their bulletin board and their newsletter.
- Post flyers around town or at the community center. All flyers should include the name and phone number of the staff member for women to contact.
- Establish a clear line of communication with the clinic.
- Send advertisements directly to tribal offices and councils.
- Contact senior sites and encourage elderly Indian women to participate.
- Send a printed invitation to every woman on the list.
- Provide a schedule of all the sessions so women can plan to attend in advance.
- Make sure to follow-up the written invitation with a phone call.





## **The Talking Circle Environment**

Hold the Circle in a clean, comfortable, friendly environment. The room should be in a private setting, so the participants can talk freely without feeling someone could overhear their conversation or be interrupted by outside noise.


There should be a comfortable place for everyone to sit in the circle. Each person should be able to hear whoever is speaking and feel part of the Circle.

## **The Facilitator**

The Talking Circle facilitator should possess good communication and leadership skills. She should be able to organize and recruit women into the group and lead them in discussions that focus on the specific topic at hand.


## **Evaluation**

It is important to evaluate the Talking Circle. It can be evaluated by both the facilitator and the participants. Feedback can be anonymous to increase candor. The information can be used to improve and promote the program as well as to generate support for future Circles.



## **Native Nutrition Circles Sessions and Topics**

- 1..... Introduction
- 2..... Overview: Healthy Lifestyles
- 3..... Diet and Health
- 4..... Traditional Native Foods
- 5..... Women and Family Health
- 6..... Nutrition and Cancer
- 7..... Nutrition and Heart Disease
- 8..... Nutrition and Diabetes
- 9..... Nutrition and Weight  
Management
- 10..... The Family Diet
- 11..... Cooking for Health
- 12..... Closing: Evaluation and  
Celebration



**Principal Investigator**  
Felicia Hodge, Dr.P.H. (Wailaki)

**Co-Investigators**  
Larri Fredericks, Ph.D., M.P.H. (Athabaskan)

**Consultants**  
Gladys Block, Ph.D.  
Doris Calloway, Ph.D.

**Project Director**  
Suzanne Kordesh, M.P.H., R.D.

**Project Research Assistants**  
Eric Jordan (Colville/Sioux/Grand Ronde)  
Rebecca Fellerman

**Administrative Assistants**  
Gloria Mattz (Yurok)  
Stephen Stuart

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**CENTER FOR AMERICAN INDIAN  
RESEARCH AND EDUCATION**

1918 University Avenue

Suite #2-A

Berkeley CA 94704

(510) 843-8661 Δ FAX (510) 843-8611

e-mail: CAIREberk@aol.com

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